

Mrs Zillah Smith

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RICHMOND:

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1824.

DISSERTATION ON THE UTILITY OF THE STUDY OF LANGUAGES, AS A
MEANS OF MENTAL IMPROVEMENT.

*Read before the Literary and Philosophical Society of Hampden
Sidney College.*

LANGUAGE is the use of articulate sounds, for the purpose of communicating to those with whom we converse, such thoughts as we wish to exist in their minds. In regard to the things signified by words, language is entirely arbitrary. Thus, *earth* might have been called *heaven*, and *heaven* might have been called *earth*; and so of every thing else. But in this case, the word *earthly* would produce the same thoughts and feelings which are now produced by the word *heavenly*, and vice versa. The object of the remark, is to show that there is nothing in language, which corresponds to the nature of the things represented by it; but that, as far as it is the invention of man, it is *conventional*. Two or more persons must have agreed on the words, *earth*, *heaven*, *man*, *woman*, &c., to represent the things for which they now stand. The words thus adopted are heard, and their application learned by children, who, from early age, so associate in their minds, the words and the things for which they stand, that the one always suggests the other.

It is foreign to our present purpose, to institute an inquiry into the origin and progress of language. But it may not be amiss to remark in passing, that the hypothesis, that man was ever a dumb savage, communicating with his fellow, only by inarticulate sounds and signs, is destitute of evidence. Man, except in the very rare instances in which he has been found, a solitary being in the forests, has never been known to be without a language. The most savage tribes, as well as the most civilized nations, communicate their thoughts and feelings by words. It is perfectly gratuitous then, to assume that our race was once entirely without *that*, which, *as far as testimony goes*, they appear always to have possessed. The argument derived from the poverty and imperfection of language, in the early history of our species, has much more power to show that man has improved, than that he invented this system of oral signs for the communication of thought. There is a wide difference, as every one knows, between inventing that which is entirely new, and of which no previous hint had been given; and improving that which has been, in any way, made known to us by another. Besides; it is hard

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By Professor ^{Wm W.} Blauvelt.
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to conceive how any number of dumb creatures, without knowing that they had the capacity of speech, should come together and agree that certain sounds should stand for certain *things*; others, for the *relations of things*; and others again, for thoughts and feelings.

There is no intention of treating this subject *theologically*; but it may be observed in passing, that the Bible gives a very different view of the case. The first record of man's having employed speech, is that from which we learn that the creator caused beast and bird to pass before Adam; and that he named them as they passed. This was done, while he was alone in the world, without a companion, with whom he might wish to hold the intercourse of thought and affection. Is it not reasonable to believe that, in this case, an influence was exerted by the Almighty, by which man was prompted and enabled to utter articulate sounds; and was thus prepared for that social life, to which he was destined? The next occasion of Adam's speaking, was the presentation of his newly created wife; whom he immediately recognised as bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. After which, speech was common enough. Nor is there the slightest hint, that among the whole antediluvian race, there was more than one language.

The question before us, is felt to be one of considerable interest, and acknowledged to be highly important. The terms in which it is proposed, lead us to inquire into the value of the study of language, as a means of mental improvement. The subject then, is connected with the great concern of education; and no man of enlarged views and correct habits of thinking, can regard it with indifference.

The study of language implies much more, than the mere learning of words by rote, and the partial application of the common rules of grammar. It is an entering into the true genius and character of language, so as to understand the thoughts conveyed by it; to perceive the various shades of meaning exhibited by different words; and, of course, the modifications of sentiment and feeling thus expressed. There is indeed, an obvious distinction between *language* and *literature*; yet it is not easy to see how the one can be thoroughly studied, without giving a large share of attention to the other. Literature and customs, manners, laws, religion, &c., all of which influence literature, produce a thousand associations, which affect the meaning of words. And what that meaning is, we cannot discover, unless we enter into these associations. A single example will explain my idea. A schoolboy renders the Latin word *Virtus*, by the English, *Virtue*, and thinks

that he has done enough. The scholar not only knows that this is not the true meaning, but that it is necessary to understand the character of the Romans as patriots and soldiers, fully to comprehend their thoughts and feelings, when they used that term. And how much must we know of the Greeks, to understand precisely what they intended, when they said *το καλον* or *το προπον*?

The object of these remarks is to show the range of thought and inquiry permitted and even required by the subject before us. In pursuing it, the attempt will be made to prove that the study of language, is of very great importance, as a means of mental improvement. In doing this, a brief notice will be taken of some very common arguments. This will be done, not because any are supposed to be unacquainted with them; but because without them, the view of the subject would appear very defective.

1. This course of mental discipline, is well adapted to the order in which the faculties of the mind are developed. Of these, the first which shows its vigor, and offers itself for culture, is the *memory*.—It is almost too trite to remark, that the study of language affords an excellent method for the improvement of this faculty. But it is worth while to observe, that there has prevailed a ridiculous custom of undervaluing the advantages of a good memory; and a foolish notion that the possession of this faculty in a high degree is evidence of a weak mind. Persons have been found silly enough to boast that their memory was very poor and very treacherous. They wished to have it understood, that they were under no obligations to others; and that their sole reliance was on the greatness of their own genius.—As though the *facts* of which every system is composed, were discoverable by intuition or by reasoning! Or, as though facts could be of any use, unless they were remembered! The truth is, there is no incompatibility of a powerful memory with a sound judgment and a brilliant imagination. And supposing other things to be equal, he who has a good memory, possesses immense advantages over him who has not.

But he who diligently observes the progress of the human mind, soon perceives in the young, the awakenings of judgment, and of the power of discrimination. And it is easy to see, that in the application of the rules of grammar; in the analysis of sentences; in explaining the meaning and use of words; and in rendering them from one language into another, there is a vigorous exercise of these faculties. And it ought always to be remembered that *vigorous exercise of the mind, is improvement.*

2. The study of language, is well adapted to improve the taste, as well as to invigorate the understanding.—Language as every one knows, is highly susceptible of beauty. No exhibitions of taste are any where to be found, finer than many which have been made by the great masters of good writing; models of this kind exert a very happy influence. As the student advances, he learns and applies the laws of versification; and thus acquires just ideas of the power of language over the imagination and the feelings. In this respect, the Latin and Greek have a decided advantage over modern languages. The prosody of the English language is meagre, and its laws of versification, are comparatively very simple. In the ancient languages, the case is widely different. The numerous changes in termination, give a great advantage in the collocation of words, and the structure of sentences. And there is a copiousness, a richness, and harmony in their prosody, altogether unrivalled. The full power of language can scarcely be understood by one who has not read Virgil and Homer. *The Cottar's Saturday Night* might be written without the knowledge of Latin and Greek; but it is very doubtful whether the same thing could be said of *Paradise Lost*.

Even in the accommodation of sound to sense, there is something inimitable in these languages. One can almost hear the shrill tones and sudden breaks of the war trumpet in Virgil's

Ære ciere viros martemque accendere cantu.

Even a child has been known to notice the correspondence between the galloping of a troop of horse, and the running of this line,

Quadrupedante putrem sonitu quatit ungula campum.

How often has the reader imagined that he heard the twanging of Apollo's bow in Homer's

Δεινὴ δὲ κλαγγὴ γενεῖ' ἀργυροῖο βιοῖο;
the roar of ocean with all its multitude of waves in

βῆ δ' ἄκρ' ἀπὸ θύρας πολυφλοίσβοιο θαλάσσης;
And the bounding and crashing of the rock of Sysiphus in

Αὐλὶς ἐπεί τ' ἀπεδόνδε κυλινδελο λαας ἀναιδῆς.

But these are light matters, and may pass for the garnishing of a dry discussion.

3. The study of different languages affords important aid in the understanding of one's native tongue. This is particularly true in regard to the English; as is evident from the fact, that of the 22,000 words which form our whole vocabulary, about 15,000 are derivatives, chiefly from French, Latin and Greek. But this topic is so trite, that it is sufficient barely to have mentioned it in this place.

It might not be improper, under this division of the subject, to notice the analogy which runs through all languages, and the advantages which may be derived from the philosophy of Grammar; but remarks on this subject will come in with greater propriety hereafter.

4. The study of languages, is of great use in teaching the habit of using words with precision. And this is intimately connected with the habit of just and clear thinking. Accustomed from infancy to associate thought and the signs of thought together, we learn to think in words; and it is extremely difficult, if not impossible to think in any other manner. He, then, who thinks clearly can, at the time, express himself with facility. On the other hand, he who is accustomed to use words in a loose indefinite way, never does think with precision. It is very common to use a word, as the sign of a vague notion, of a feeling, or a prejudice; and to employ it with much confidence, without any accurate knowledge of the subject. An apt illustration is afforded in the use of names appropriated to parties and sects, of terms of art, &c. Thus the terms *Calvinism*, *Arminianism*, *Presbyterianism*, and the like in religion, are very often used by persons who know no more of their proper meaning, than they know of the stature and colour of the inhabitants of the moon. During the former violence of political parties, the same remark was often made respecting the use of the terms *Federalist* and *Republican*. The whole account in such cases, that many are able to give when questioned as to their meaning, is, that it is something which they *do*, or *do not like*.

I do not love you Doctor Fell;
The reason why, I cannot tell;
But I don't love you Doctor Fell.

A pretended connoisseur in the art of painting, gives many a ridiculous exemplification of this remark, by the perpetual use of *keeping*, and *harmony*, &c. without being able to give a definition at all, better than *ancient Pistol's* of the word *accommodate*: "It it whereof, as a body may say, whereby, we accommodate."

But the vague use of words is not so uncommon as these remarks might seem to imply. Ask almost any man, what he means by *nature*, *politics*, *money*; by *taste*, *genius*, *talents*; and you will perceive that he has no very definite idea of words which he takes occasion to use, perhaps, every hour in the day. In truth it is extremely difficult to avoid this fault. It is hard to convince a man that he does not understand what

he has heard ever since he can remember. The study of languages affords an important remedy for this evil ; because it compels one to pay particular attention to the meaning of words, and to exercise a nice discrimination on the various modifications of thought expressed by different words. This is particularly true in regard to the practice of translating ; because it obliges the student to compare the corresponding words of different languages, and often to express the meaning of a single term by a circumlocution. No one pretends that this fault cannot be corrected in another way. But it may well be doubted whether any other method so easy and certain has yet been discovered.

These are the advantages which have commonly been ascribed to this course of mental discipline ; and certainly they are of no small importance. But there are others of still higher character, to which the attention of every student ought to be turned most seriously. Whatever theory we may adopt concerning the origin of language, it is altogether a very curious and interesting subject of inquiry. If we assume that language was suggested to the first man, by his all-wise and good Creator ; we must believe that, as it is intended to be a vehicle of thought, its fundamental principles are analogous to the operations of the human mind. On this hypothesis, language affords the medium, through which our Maker has instructed us in mental philosophy.—If language is the invention of man ; it is beyond a doubt, the most curious and striking display that has ever been made of the efforts of the human intellect, turning alternately on itself and on the objects of thought intended to be represented by words. In no other way, has man ever presented his mind in its various modes of operation, so fully to our inspection ; or so brought out to view all that passes in the little world within us. On this hypothesis, as well as the other, it is clear that the study of language affords the most important facilities for cultivating the science of the human mind. Language is the medium through which we see how the soul acts and feels. It affords the means of making observations and inductions, which could be made in no other way. It is a work of extreme difficulty for the mind to turn on itself, and watch its own operations. The perception of an external object produces a sensation : If I attend to the object, the sensation escapes notice ; and if I attend to the sensation, the object is unnoticed, and the sensation vanishes. We cannot seize on thoughts and hold them down for inspection and examination. There are no reservoirs, in which we

can confine our feelings, and subject them to experiment.* It is of immense advantage then to the student, that he can obtain assistance from his fellow-man; who, in the structure of language, has told him all that he knows concerning the operations of mind. Let one look for a moment into the ablest writers on *mental science*, and he will at once see, what important use has been made of this auxiliary.

It will not be supposed that my remarks are carried too far, when it is considered that language is the expression of thoughts and feelings; that is, of the operations of the human mind. While then we are studying language, we are in truth studying the human mind as it develops itself in all the modes which can be expressed by words.

This observation lays the foundation for another, and that of no small importance; the knowledge of languages affords the only means of tracing the *history of mind*, in its progress through various ages, from the commencement of written records to the present day. The language of any people, marks precisely the boundaries of their thoughts, and the progress of their knowledge; because they will have words to express what they know, and will want none to designate things of which they are ignorant. This is true in regard to *art* as well as science. A people who have no words for *plough, hoe, spade, razor, knife, plate, spoon*, afford convincing evidence of rudeness and barbarism; and so in relation to all the arts of civilized life. Hence it follows, that he who ascends to the primitive languages, makes himself acquainted with one or more of them, and traces their filiations down through successive generations to the present time, enables himself to bring under his inspection, the human mind, in its various conditions, and the improvements which it has made in science, from the earliest periods of society to that in which he lives. It is easy to see that an attainment by which we are enabled to do this, is of very great value. In this point of view, then, the study of languages, is of immense importance.

But these remarks have been made, for the especial purpose of showing the advantage afforded by this knowledge, in the study of human nature. It has been before intimated, that this study requires careful observation, and extensive laborious induction. Otherwise, general principles cannot be

* At least, none have been yet invented. We cannot say what the *materialists* may hereafter accomplish. Our *great* literary institutions may in time to come, for any thing we know, be furnished with ample apparatus for this purpose; and the lecture rooms of some famous physiologico-metaphysician may yet be hung round with vials of thought and feeling, kept in with ground stoppers, and always ready for use!

established on a foundation so firm as not to be shaken. A philosopher who pursues his inquiries, with the aid of only a single language, works at great disadvantage. He is under the influence of received opinions, prejudices, early associations; and finds it extremely difficult to be sufficiently on his guard. But he who has taken a wide range through different languages, has it in his power to make an extensive induction; to compare men of different ages and generations, and of course to fix his opinions on the most solid foundation. An induction of this kind, extended through all languages, would, it is thought, show a belief in the *efficiency* of causes, as universal and invincible, as that in the uniformity of the course of nature. We may be puzzled by the ingenious reasonings of acute metaphysicians on the *relation of cause and effect*, and be told that there is nothing in it but *antecedence and consequence*; but after all, we cannot help believing in efficiency. And language affords most decisive evidence, that men every where entertained the same belief. This may arise from the consciousness of power in man; or it may be utterly unaccountable. But, "in whatever manner it may arise, or whatever circumstances may or may not be necessary for giving birth to it, the belief itself is a fact in the history of mind, which it is impossible to deny."

There is another advantage to be derived from the study of languages, of sufficient importance to merit particular attention. It affords facilities, which nothing else can afford, of obtaining a general knowledge of mankind. *Dr. Sacy* the great orientalist, in a speech lately made at the anniversary of the Paris Bible Society, embraced the opportunity of noticing the advantages which literature is deriving from the benevolent exertions of the present age, to diffuse universally the blessings of christianity. On this subject, there is perhaps no more competent judge in the world. He adverted particularly to the increased facilities of acquiring the knowledge of various languages, afforded by translations of the Bible, and by the grammars and dictionaries constructed by the missionaries. In the course of his remarks, he laid it down as a maxim, generally admitted, *that to know a people, one must know their language.*

This is perfectly true; and it is not difficult to discover the reason. Language, as has been often remarked, is an exhibition of thoughts and feelings. When we understand any particular language, then, we know how the people who use it, are accustomed to think and feel: we understand their habits, associations, passions and prejudices: we see them, as

they exhibit themselves: we mark the extent of their knowledge, and comprehend their intellectual character: we can go with them into the field, the senate, the forum, the theatre, and the chamber, and enjoy a sort of familiar acquaintance with them every where.

But it is said, that we may learn all this from translations of standard authors into our own language; and learn it at a much less expense of time, labour and money. As this objection is considerably relied on, it deserves a full refutation.

1. It is well known that multitudes of words, express modifications of thought and feeling, which cannot be transferred to another language. Who can translate with exactness, and yet with the full force of the original, the phrase *εκων αεκουληγε θυμω*. Or to use a much higher instance, who can do any thing like justice to the words of St. Paul, *καθ' υπερβολην εις υπερβολην αιωνιον βαρος δοξης*? These instances are taken at random, as they happen to occur. Every one's reading will furnish him with innumerable others of the same kind.

2. There are in every language, idiomatical sentences and phrases, expressing peculiar turns of thought, which it is impossible to translate. There are many forms of speech too, originating in particular habits and occupations, which partake of the same character. A familiar example may be given, for the sake of illustration; a Virginian tobacco planter, remarked the other day, of a young man, who makes a mighty bluster of words, and deals much in rhetorical exaggeration; "*Ah! Mr.——needs a great deal of topping and succouring too.*" Now this is perfectly intelligible; and no words in the English language could more felicitously express the mental discipline, which the young man needs. But who could translate them into Latin or French! The same idea, indeed, could be expressed in a different manner. But, then there would be a total loss of every thing characteristic of the *Virginian planter*. A man living on the western waters, will say in the way of defiance; "If you get hold of me, you'll find that you have run foul of a *sawyer*."—A saying of great pith; and easy to be understood by any man living in the great valley of the Mississippi, but hard to be translated. There are a thousand expressions of this sort, which in a very striking manner, set before the student the habits and associations of the people who use them, and present lively views of their intellectual and moral character.

3. The peculiar turn and structure of every language is such, that literal translations are not tolerated, nor indeed

are they at all tolerable. The critics always put their black mark on them where they occur ; so that the *Gallicisms*, the *Latinisms*, &c., of translations are common objects of censure. Hence, when I read Livy and Virgil, Thucydides and Homer in English, I see Greek and Roman thoughts and feelings, as they are coloured by English idioms and associations. Homer in Pope's translation, is no more like Homer in the original, than a garden with its gravel walks, and clipped evergreens, and artificial cascades and *jets d'eau*, is like the boundless forest of America, with its lofty oaks, its towering mountains, its majestic rivers, and its mighty cataract. When I study the Latin and Greek languages, I hear Greeks expressing themselves in their own idiom, and can enter into their associations, judge of their peculiar feelings, and form an intimate acquaintance with them. *De Sacy* is right : to know a people, we must know their language. Of course, the more languages we are acquainted with, the more extensive will be our knowledge of mankind.

It ought to be observed too, that as the language of any people is the exact measure of their knowledge and refinement, so he, who thoroughly studies the language, acquires the knowledge and partakes of the refinement. This remark is of great importance not only to show the value of the study of languages, but to regulate the choice of the student. It is much more advantageous to study French than Russian ; German than Spanish ; because there is much more science and literature among the French and Germans, than among the Russians and Spaniards. Hence, we see a good reason why, among ancient languages the preference is given, for general purposes, to Latin and Greek. Hence too, the importance of the Hebrew ; because they who spake that language, had more knowledge of the true religion, than all the other nations in the world.

There is another, and a very highly interesting view of our general subject, which ought to be presented in this dissertation. To go back to the beginnings of human existence, and pursue the stream of languages through successive ages ; to see how the various generations of men thought, and felt, and acted, gives a mighty expansion to the thoughts, and a wide range to the affections. It connects all ages of the world, and makes man feel his affinity to man. It presents to our view, the whole moral constitution of the world, and brings us into contact with beings of like passions with ourselves. It makes us conversant with the joys and sorrows of human nature, and with all the sympathies of the heart, under

every form of human existence. The effect of which I speak is clearly seen, among all nations where the study of the ancient languages is made an important part of education, in the deep solicitude felt for the modern Greeks, in their present struggle for liberty. Much indeed is felt, because a nation long oppressed is rising against their oppressors ; and much too, because christian is turning against infidel. But apart from all these considerations, it is manifest, from all that is said on this subject, that there is a transfer of interest from the ancestors to their posterity. All who speak or write on this subject, make mention of Homer and Demosthenes ; of the nursery of the arts, and the seat of the Muses ; of Thermopylæ and Salamis ; and we see that these associations kindle a higher zeal in the cause of Grecian independence. Hence it is, that while civilized governments pursue a cold, calculating, heartless policy ; the people stand *a tiptoe* in the eagerness of their expectation ; and listen with intense interest to every rumour that is wafted on the eastern breeze. How different the state of feeling in regard to Naples and Spain ! True ; a deep sympathy was felt for the gallant Mina, the unhappy Riego, and their compatriots. But what we felt in this case for individuals, we feel in the other for the entire Grecian nation. Is not this a very striking illustration of the effect of the course of mental discipline, which it is my object to recommend ?

And here I cannot help remarking, that Providence in wisdom, seems to have directed this thing. The messages of divine mercy, and the authentic information which God has given, to teach men the way of salvation, are contained in two ancient languages. Of these, one has strong claims to be regarded as the primitive language. It exhibits human society in its very cradle ; and the operations of intellect in the infancy of human existence. The other, an affiliated language too, presents the understanding of man, in its most highly cultivated state, and displays the powers of mind to the greatest possible advantage. It is worth while, too, to observe, that the Hebrew cannot be perfectly understood, without a knowledge of the cognate Dialects, *Arabic, Chaldee, and Syriac* ; that the Greek Testament cannot be well interpreted without a knowledge of the Hebrew Bible ; while the Septuagint version is of very great advantage in the interpretation both of the Old and New Testament ; and finally, that the student is utterly unprepared for these studies, without a good knowledge of the Latin. In this way, a wise and gracious Providence has ordered, that the studies necessary for

an enlightened interpretation of the Bible, should be such, to repeat a former idea, as give enlarged views to the mind, and a wide range to the feelings; such as connect the present with the past; as cause us to identify ourselves with our species; and bring the whole intellect of our race, in contact with our own.

There are some other topics which I wish to introduce, but it may be well, previously to notice an objection to some of the reasoning heretofore employed, which has been brought forward in a very plausible shape, and urged with considerable ingenuity. The objection is this, "As we think in words, and as language is intended to express things and their relations; the knowledge of one copious language is quite sufficient to answer every valuable purpose. It is therefore a waste of time, to go first to a Frenchman, then to a German, to ascertain the name by which he calls a thing, which we are already acquainted with. It would be much more profitable to extend our knowledge to things of which we are ignorant."

Now I readily admit that the mere learning of words, is a pitiable waste of time. But this is not what is implied in the study of language. But I beg leave to observe that, in my apprehension, the fallacy of the objection lies in supposing that words are the *signs of things* and of *their relations*: whereas, they are the *signs of our thoughts*. For instance, the word *tree*, is not the sign of a thing so called by us; but of our thought concerning that thing. I consider *tree*, as a general term. Now there are hundreds of trees of different kinds, locust, oak, hickory, maple, &c. &c.; but it is no one of them, in particular, which I mean, when I say *tree*. And who can show me a *thing* called a *tree*, which shall not be oak, hickory, locust, maple, nor any other particular kind of tree? It is evident that the mind, in this case, takes that which is common to a great many kinds, and expresses this common idea by the word *tree*. Again; if I say *locust tree*; it is evident that I have marked the particular kind, which I mean to designate by the term; that I have noted the particulars in which trees of this kind agree with and differ from all others; and that I design to express my judgment of this agreement on the one hand, and difference on the other, by the term *locust tree*: that is, the word is a sign of my thought. It is only in a secondary sense, then, that words are the signs of things. This is beyond a doubt true, in regard to all general terms; without which, by the way, there can be no classification, no science, no improvement. Now, when our thoughts about things correspond to their real nature; our thoughts are just,

and the words by which we utter them, express truth ; when the case is different, they express error or falsehood.

It cannot but occur to every one here, that there are many subjects on which we are liable to think erroneously. Many errors arise from early prejudices, from customary modes of speaking, from national or provincial habits and customs, the very existence of which, perhaps we should never suspect, did we not find that others had viewed things very differently. We might here revert, for the sake of illustration, to the important subject of mental philosophy ; to the many errors which have prevailed to great extent in relation to it ; and to the acknowledged difficulty of prosecuting the study to advantage. These errors may be corrected, and the difficulty greatly diminished, by careful attention to the signs of thought employed by many different persons in different circumstances.

These remarks show that a knowledge of language is not mere knowledge of words. It is the knowledge of thoughts ; of the thoughts of men under different circumstances, and with various opportunities of observation ; a knowledge of their thoughts concerning subjects of consciousness, and objects of sense.—When so many sources of error are opened around us, it is no small advantage to learn by means of language, how great multitudes of men have thought ; and to be able to compare their thoughts. And, surely the diligent pursuit of means to attain this vantage ground, ought not to be called a mere *logomania*, vain and unprofitable.

Another answer to this objection may be derived from a consideration of the subject of *philosophical grammar* ; which will also set in a stronger light some of my former arguments. But first, it will be necessary briefly to explain what is meant by the philosophy of grammar.

All languages have many things in common. Prevalent analogies run through them, to a wide extent. A comparison of different languages, therefore, enables the student to settle a number of general principles of grammar ; and, what is of much more importance, considering language as the great common vehicle of human thoughts, a number of general principles concerning the operations of the human mind.

These principles when classified or combined, constitute what has been, not unaptly termed, the philosophy of grammar.—Now, I would not affirm that it is *impossible* to make such an analysis of a single language, as might enable one to establish general principles, and indeed to discover all that language can teach us respecting mental philosophy ; but I venture to say that the thing is extremely difficult. And per-

haps no one would have ever thought of the attempt, had not different languages, in offering themselves to be compared, suggested a plan by which many difficulties in the philosophy of mind have been overcome, and many enlarged and very interesting views taken of human nature. The following very just remarks on this subject, are quoted from Brewster's Encyclopedia, Art. Grammar. "The different languages of Greece and Rome, for instance, have been compared with those of modern Europe, and both these with the languages of the East, and the great differences apparent in their origin and structure, have afforded a valuable opportunity of tracing with a scientific hand, the general operations of man, in this conspicuous part of his active efforts. An extensive erudition in literature, confers emancipation from that enthralling influence, which any single language exercises over those whose knowledge is confined to it. The errors, which the habits of one would produce, receive correction from the attention exacted by the varying genius of another." Thus we see the benevolence of Deity in adducing good out of what has been regarded as evil; in enabling man, by means of the diversity of languages, to give wider range and greater precision to human thought, and enlarge the boundaries of true science.

The last particular topic which I shall bring into this Essay, is regarded as a matter of very high importance. *The study of language has a very salutary influence in correcting the effects of exclusive attention to physical science.* Let none here mistake me. I am far from undervaluing this study. Indeed no one more earnestly wishes than I do, to see physical science diligently and extensively cultivated in our colleges, and pursued with enthusiasm in after life. But while this is so, I do fully believe that exclusive devotion to this department of knowledge, has a strong tendency to produce *materialism* in the philosophy of the mind, and *scepticism* in religion. When we pursue physical science exclusively, the whole attention is directed to the material world, the world without us; and to the various modifications of matter, produced by what are called the laws of nature. These are observed and studied, and the effects of them noted, until matter is thought to possess an intrinsic and independent agency. In the daily course of experiment and observation, there is nothing directly to bring the existence and operations of mind to recollection. First, man is believed to be only organized matter, under the effects of various stimuli; next, a superintending intelligence is excluded from the world; and finally mind is banished from the universe—there is nothing but mat-

ter and motion! It does appear evident to me, that such is the effect of these studies; and I think that my remarks would be amply confirmed by a full and fair history of science. We need only look to the metropolis of Scotland, and that of France, to witness striking evidences of my opinion.

But while physical science fixes the attention on the world without us; a study of languages, in the wide sense in which I have used the phrase, turns to the world of wonders within us. It is a study of mind and its various operations, as far as they can be expressed by language, a study of the highest parts of our own nature; of that in us, which allies us to Deity, of the *particula auræ divinæ*, which at creation was breathed into man. The effect of such studies is, to make us intellectual beings, and to inspire man with higher reverence of himself, as a spiritual creature, who must shortly lay down this clay tabernacle, but yet retain all the essential parts of his nobler nature, and live in another mode of existence forever and ever.

I do not pretend, indeed, that these studies have in them a sanctifying power; nor do I say that a man may not make great progress in them, and yet have very low thoughts of religion. Indeed, in the great combination of moral causes operating on every individual, it is impossible to determine before hand, what direction he may take, or what form his character may assume. But yet we know enough of human nature to be able to judge, with very considerable accuracy, the effect of any one given cause. And if my observations have not utterly deceived me, there is a tendency in *exclusive devotion to physical science, to scepticism*; and in studies which have MIND and its operations for their particular object, to afford a corrective.

For the Lit. and Evan. Magazine.

TWO DIFFERENT MODES OF INTERPRETING SCRIPTURE.

THE true method of interpreting Scripture, is a subject of very great importance. God speaks to us in the Bible, concerning the salvation of our souls. We ought, then, to be most careful to ascertain what *he means*, when he thus addresses us. It is truly wonderful, that there should be any dispute or difficulty as to the general principles of interpretation to be applied to the Scriptures. He who *speaks* to us, whether he be man, angel, or God, unless he means to deceive us,

which in the last case it would be blasphemy to suppose, must use language in the way in which we are accustomed to use it. This single remark shows, that the meaning of the Bible must be ascertained precisely as that of other ancient books. We must understand the languages in which they are written, and make ourselves acquainted with the various circumstances which regulate the meaning of words ; and having done this, we must learn the meaning of these writings, just as we are accustomed to learn the meaning of words spoken in our hearing, of letters addressed to us, or books written by our contemporaries.

These plain dictates of common sense, however, have been strangely disregarded, and principles of interpretation have been adopted, which, in their application, make sad work of the sense and meaning of the Bible. An instance of this, is furnished by a method, which may be denominated, *THE OLD ACCOMMODATION SYSTEM*. The general principle of this system is, that *every thing in the Bible may be accommodated to gospel times, and explained in reference to facts and doctrines contained in the New Testament*. The most zealous advocates of this system, carry it so far, as to give to every part of the Scriptures a *spiritual meaning*.

Interpreters of this kind, not only admit, as they doubtless ought, the *types* mentioned in the New Testament, and the prophecies of the Messiah there appealed to ; but are prepared to make a type of any thing, and to derive spiritual truth and christian doctrine from every thing. Thus all the parts of the high priest's dress, the various ornaments of the temple, the implements for offering sacrifices, &c. will furnish in the hands of these men, abundant evidence in support of their peculiar doctrines. To give a few instances, in the way of illustration.

The narrative of the mission of Eleazer, Abraham's steward to Mesopotamia, to procure a wife for Isaac, has furnished a fine opportunity for the display of ingenuity, to mystical and allegorizing interpreters : thus Isaac represents the blessed Saviour ; Eleazer, the minister of the gospel ; Rebecca the soul ; and the ten camels, the ten commandments. Rebecca's acceptance of Eleazer's invitation, signifies the willingness of the soul to engage in a life of religion. Her mounting on one of the camel's, indicates, that when the life of religion is first thought of, the soul has recourse to *the law*, and endeavours to work out a righteousness of its own. When Isaac is first seen, Rebecca dismounts—that is, when the soul obtains a sight of Christ, it leaves the law as a foundation of

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